

**House International Relations Committee  
Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats  
Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly**

**Markup of H. Res. 673**

February 14, 2006

Today, the Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats is marking up two resolutions.

The first item on the agenda is H. Res. 673, a resolution introduced by Congressman John Shimkus, expressing support for the efforts of the people of Belarus to establish a full democracy and respect for human rights, and urging the government to conduct a free and fair presidential election on March 19.

Belarus is often described as the last dictatorship in Europe. In the past three or four years, especially since the 2004 parliamentary elections and referendum, President Alexander Lukashenko has increased repression against NGOs, media outlets and any opponents of the government, including youth groups.

Perhaps most disturbing are the cases of the forced disappearances of journalists and others who have dared to criticize the Lukashenko regime. To date, the government of Belarus has refused to conduct an impartial investigation into these disappearances and has refused to allow independent, UN-appointed investigators to look into these cases.

The purpose of this resolution is two-fold. First, it supports the courageous people of Belarus who are trying to establish basic freedoms and democratic institutions in their country. Second, it urges Belarusian authorities to ensure fully transparent and free and fair presidential elections on March 16. A key aspect of fair campaigns and elections is the ability of all parties to have unimpeded access to print and electronic media.

As President Bush said last year, and I quote: "One of the roles that the United States can play is to speak clearly about the need for Belarus to be free, and to work with people to insist that Belarus be free." This is exactly what we will be doing with the adoption of this resolution.

My office has worked closely with the Rep. Shimkus's office on the language of House Resolution 673. I am an original cosponsor of this legislation and urge its passage by the subcommittee.

I will now turn to my good friend, Congressman Rob Wexler, for a statement.